

# EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE AT AMBLESIDE.

A conference, organised by Mr. Wynn-Williams, H.M. Inspector of Schools for the county of Westmorland, has been held by the invitation of Miss Mason at the "House of Education," Ambleside. The object of the conference was to consider if it would be possible in schools of various types to adopt a method of education by books and things which has for the past 15 years been worked with excellent results in connection with the "Parents' Union," and known as the Parents' Review School. Invitations were sent to the local teachers, representing various kinds of elementary schools in the county, and, in addition to these, the Education Authority as well as the secondary schools were represented. The teachers from the following schools attended: Public elementary schools—Misses Sowerthwaite (Beverly), Sheard (Kendal), Roberts (Ambleside), Stevenson (Appley), Messers, Langton (Bowness), Aspinwall (Windermere), Fuller (Grassmere), Bentley (Ambleside), Joyce (Troutbeck), Lister (Kendal), Gardiner (Kendal), Stephenson (Tebay), Stewart (Kirkby Stephen), T. Hook (Roughy), Jackson (Warrey), Audartson (Staveley), Webster (Croseslake), Nummams (Mithorpe), Abraham (Crestthwaite). Preparatory schools—Mr. Snow (Windermere); secondary schools—Misses Reynolds (Kendal), Warren (Kendal), Local Education Authority—Mr. Tipper. The chair was taken by Mr. Wynn-Williams, who apologised for the absence of Mr. Gibbs, the chairman of the County Education Authority, Dr. England, and Miss Cropper. He (the chairman) congratulated the conference on its representative character, and mentioned they were met together to consider the following agenda:—(1) What were the essentials of an educative syllabus, and how far possible in elementary schools? (2) A curriculum for schools of all classes for children under the age of 14 years. (3) English history as the pivot upon which a liberal curriculum should turn. (4) The free use of books by children, so making such a curriculum possible. (5) The saving of time and the relief to the teacher which would accrue from the use of books. He (the chairman) hoped they would have the views of Miss Mason first, especially as she had found how successful they were amongst the students at the "House of Education." Miss Mason said it was a great pleasure to her that so many had accepted her invitation to discuss a matter which concerned all who had education at heart. Education had been placed on a different footing since the publication of the "Suggestions for the consideration of teachers" by the Board of Education. The scheme she was about to suggest was on the lines of that volume which she had worked for the past fifteen years with considerable success. She thought they might safely conclude, by the presence of their chairman, they would have the concurrence of the Board of Education if they adopted a syllabus in their schools as suggested above. The foundation of a large part of this fuller life was the reading-habit which must be formed in school-days and in school-hours, for it certainly would not be formed afterwards. The habit of studious and connected reading must be got in the history and literature and other lessons. The next item was Nature study, with the foundation of "Common Information," which Huxley said should be the preparation for science. In the teaching of art children should be taught to use the brush and charcoal, but not the pencil, and should have "picture-talks." Physical culture should include hygiene, physiology, and also physical exercises. There should also be more culture in order to give a child some self-knowledge and some power of self-direction. Handicrafts, moreover, ought to receive attention in every school, and as far as possible based on a course of card-board sloyd. The Chairman asked how far such a syllabus could be made applicable to the elementary schools, especially with respect to science. Mr. Tipper thought that very little science could be taught in elementary schools. There might be a little chemistry, perhaps, and nature-study taught, but pure science was not essential. Mr. Lister (Kendal) said that in schools where the staff was adequate it might be possible to have simple scientific teaching, but more of an experimental nature and illustrative of common objects in life. But in schools moderately staffed he felt it would be unwise to attempt the teaching of this subject. The Chairman expressed the view that a specialised form of science-teaching should not be included in the curriculum of the ordinary elementary school, but should be left to the technical and secondary schools. Miss Reynolds felt it was well to have a lesson on morals in immediate connection with school life once a week. History and literature afforded illustration in morals. The Chairman remarked that Miss Mason's suggestion was that the curriculum for all schools should be alike to 14; should include history and the other subjects discussed and then the difficulties of re-ordination of schools would disappear. Miss Warren (Kendal) thought that it was difficult to deal with the children from elementary schools as they knew no Latin, French, or mathematics; but Miss Reynolds was of opinion that French was the one language which could not be postponed. Miss Mason said that literature and history were perhaps the crucial subjects, and that these subjects might afford a common ground of agreement. She also thought by the free use of books much time might be saved, and there would be less need for composition lessons. The Chairman introduced the question of history as the pivot of instruction. Mr. Stewart enquired how the books could be obtained. Miss Mason wondered whether a charge could be made per child, and thought the education authorities would supply text-books and copies of all books for teachers' use. Mr. Lister saw a great difficulty in this suggestion, because education was becoming so costly, and he felt that rate-payers could not be expected to pay. Mr. Bentley (Ambleside) said in his school he expected there were 75 per cent. of the children who were able to buy their own books. Still he anticipated a difficulty in collecting the money. Mr. Fuller (Grassmere) agreed also, and felt that some years ago this system would have been easier, but not so now, though in Grassmere there had a good library, and many of his children were great readers. Mr. Gardiner generally favoured Miss Mason's proposal. Mr. Tipper thought the education authority already spent much on education, but that the personal possession of a book was educative and that it would be a good thing for parents, on many occasions the education gate fell very lightly, in many something towards the cost of education in this way, and that the local authority might be willing to meet the schools in the matter.